

SYMPHONY OF A BLACKBIRD



ADEBIMPE ADEYEMI

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**Poems**

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To the many joys that poetry brings and the sharing of many  
stories

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## *A cknowledgement*

**My Body is a Crime Scene** was first published by Elsieisy's blog on July 7, 2020. Republished in 2021 in the Poems from the Heron Clan VIII Anthology.

**Does The Body Ever Get Familiar With Grief?** was published by Olongo Africa in 2025.

**Nobody Sees Me** was published in 2021 in the Heron Clan VIII Anthology.

**Before I Have A Daughter** was published by Figure Feminist in 2025.





## *Introduction*

The poems in Adeyemi's *Symphony of a Blackbird* aligns with a formidable tradition of African women writers telling feminine stories and spotlighting the struggles of women in predominantly patriarchal societies. Writing unabashedly about themes that reflect deeply her lived experiences and the experiences of women across the world (with her major focus on Africa). The persona addresses numerous issues that the girl child has to grapple with.

From the first poem in the chapbook, the poet invites the reader to witness how a woman's body is policed, dictated to, controlled and used.

In "My Body Is a Crime Scene" the poet persona writes about how the body of a woman becomes the site of various crimes—creating a picturesque account of the gradual death of innocence. In the second stanza, the poem captures profoundly the poet persona's experience as a girl-child in a typical African home:

*Mother says I need policing  
The reason my thoughts, hair, face, dress  
is always under scrutiny is because  
Boys don't get pregnant  
You, lady, are always the victim*

With a deft language coupled with an acute imagery that lends credence to her themes, Adeyemi's poetry succeeds in capturing the dominant realities of embodying femininity. This collection reminds of the important works of women poets such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Lola Shoneyin, Victoria Kankara, Warsan Shire, Safia Elhillo, Ladan Osman, and others. Situating her poetry in the tradition of these older and contemporary African women poets,

there is a striking reechoing of the struggles engaged by these women poets in Adeyemi's poetry.

Adeyemi's "*My Body Is a Crime Scene*" evokes what Lola Shoneyin's seminal collection, *So All The Time I Was Sitting On An Egg*, does in her examination of the plight of women in male dominating spaces. In Lola Shoneyin's "She Tried" and "Stop Slimming Me" the poet persona interrogates the burden of being policed as a female child in a patriarchal society. The subject of being "excessive", "doing/being too much" permeates these poems as Shoneyin describes how unbearable these reckless comments and ignorant perspectives about women can be. Adeyemi's preoccupation in this collection, reminds us of how poetry – especially African women's poetry – responds powerfully in different forms to these issues and provides a way of shaping and correcting the misrepresentation and narratives about women in society.

Furthering her journey of exploring the realities of femininity, Adebimpe reflects on the issue of love and heartbreak in some of the poems in this collection. While love is a universal experience, the love described by the poet persona is rooted in a past filled with unsettling encounters with diverse ways in which love can become sour. Engaging love through familial lens, personal lens, and societal lens, these poems push the readers to ask questions about the fragility of love, while also reminding them of the ruin that love births when it ends. In poems such as "Beneath the Pain of a Love that Continually Evades" and "Becoming My Mother", there is a harrowing description of love – sometimes unreciprocated, sometimes not reciprocated enough. In both poems, the readers are invited to think about familial love and personal love.

Adeyemi's poetry leads the readers into rooms where they find themselves in the photographs on the walls of these poems.



“Becoming My Mother” evokes the collective experience of women who have carried and continue to carry with them the bruises of a broken home, of a home filled with everyday complaints and marital weariness., Adebimpe’s deployment of imagery and symbolism performs the pivotal role of revealing to the readers the trauma of the past and the aches of the present.

This preoccupation can also be seen in the poetry of Warsan Shire, the Somali-British poet and a major voice in contemporary African poetry. In Shire’s collection, *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head*, there is an unflinching interrogation of the tradition of vilifying women who prove themselves to be worthy of being venerated by men who feel threatened about these women’s successes. There is also the trope of suffering occasioned by the endless endurance of women in their marital homes for the sake of their children. Shire’s “Bless the Real Housewife” and Adebimpe’s “Becoming My Mother” attend to similar themes of women navigating the difficult situation of enduring their marriage because of the children. This theme resonates powerfully across the poetry of these women poets as they bear witness to their reality and the lived experiences of other African women.

The poet persona focuses on the memories of events that shaped her formative years as a girl-child living in a typical African society. Mapping these memories and their roles in her understanding of her life as a woman, she presents to the readers the realities of growing older and the elusiveness of understanding certain things about one’s life. Again, the subject of love is infused into these memories. However, the love engaged by Adeyemi in “Nobody Sees Me” considers the desire for love as a child by the poet persona, especially the outspoken and open display of affection that is often missing in a lot of African homes. The transition from that stage of longing for familial love by a child to

a woman who questions the meaning of “I love you” as she realises that she desires more than the three-letter words thrown at her by society. This moment of questing guides the poet persona to the meaning of being seen or being invisible. In the poem, she writes:

I have always been misunderstood  
Nobody sees me, nobody cares to  
Maybe I ask for the impossible  
Maybe nobody truly sees anybody.

The theme of identity permeates this collection. In each poem, there is a startling revelation, a testament to aches, a realisation of what is missing, what remains, what is said, and what remains unspoken. There is the ceremony of love and loss, and both are interwoven in a way that troubles the readers’ understanding of the world they inhabit. In the other poems in the chapbook, Adebimpe attends to themes such as the demise of some of her beloveds, her country’s multifarious problems, and other themes. These poems are birthed from a deep sense of awareness and perspective on the occurrences in society. Adeyemi recognises the need to write poetry that brings the readers close to the wounds and aches of their own lives and the lived realities of women and female children across the world. With her mastery of lyricism, her attention to the seamless flow of verses, and her impeccable deployment of language, this important poetry chapbook marks the arrival of an African woman poet that will contribute to the canon of poetry that celebrates the lived experiences of African women.

**Rasaq Malik Gbolahan**

Author, *The Origin of Wounds*



# SONGS OF BROKENNESS



## MY BODY IS A CRIME SCENE

(i)

My body is a crime scene  
Call the cops  
'Cos you can't hide the corpse

Mother says I need policing  
The reason my thoughts, hair, face, dress  
Are always under scrutiny, because  
"Boys don't get pregnant"  
"You, lady, are always the victim"  
My body is a crime scene  
Cordoned by red and yellow tape  
Don't draw unnecessary attention to yourself  
This body is the crime scene

(ii)

I fought my ordained lot of victimhood  
Landed in the next of an acclaimed \*Sabum  
Bird of prey seeking to learn self-defence  
In my defence, I came vulnerable, pure-hearted—I came naive.  
"I serve you on the field,  
You service me off the field."  
My body is a prize  
Trophy to the hardworking master  
Token of appreciation for a job well done  
This body is the prize



(iii)

Average score in a course of distinction  
Months of stalking and chasing the academic god  
My lecturer says to get my rightful score  
I must appeal  
Appease the custodian of marks  
My body is a sacrifice  
Shredded on the altar of good grades  
Nectar poured out as libation  
Grease to the marker's rod  
My body is the sacrifice

(iv)

You say I have the keys  
To the life I can't afford by my own means  
Girl, use what you have  
Get what you want  
My body is the currency  
Chip to the baby girl lifestyle  
Power that brings strong men to their knees  
This body is the price

My body is a crime scene  
Shallow graves of concealed hurt  
Cutting silence, culture's mould  
Image drive, "don't you dare make the News"  
Shocked acting, entreaties of solemnity  
Faux outrage, media frenzy

My ultimate crime is wearing this body  
This body is the crime.

*\*Sabum: Master, the Korean name for a Taekwondo instructor.*

**DOES THE BODY EVER GET FAMILIAR WITH GRIEF?**

(with a line from Ed Sheeran's A Team)

*For Oby, Albert, Quadri, Koye-Ladele, and everyone who left us too early*

Does the body ever get familiar with grief?  
This sinking, this drowning  
Going underwater and unable to find an anchor

Does one ever get used to sorrow?  
The smile on the face of a stranger  
The singsong laughter of a passer-by  
A look that reminds of exactly  
how much you loved life

Is there a day when one finally forgets?  
This broken-down edifice  
The ruin of what would have made a magnificent temple  
How you were wrested from us  
Death clamping her hands around you

Do the memories ever fade?  
Another birthday comes along  
The memories resurge and threaten to choke  
The what-ifs besiege our facade of healing

We would try to banish the tears  
Console ourselves with thoughts of a life well-lived  
Make rings of joy around memories that grate  
Turn away lest the world see our hurting souls

Will this body ever get familiar with grief?  
We learn to live past the hurt





The good ones never see the light of day  
The world remains a place too cold for angels  
It's too cold outside for angels to fly

**NOBODY SEES ME**

When I was a child,  
All I wanted was to hear those words  
“I love you just the way you are”  
From the mouths of my loved ones

Now, I am older,  
I have heard the words  
One a dozen times  
I have found that what I wanted wasn't really the words

My friend says I am troubled  
and mine isn't the good kind  
I am the kind of troubled  
That would laugh and play tonight  
And wake tomorrow to commit suicide  
Without so much as a note

I have always been misunderstood  
Nobody sees me, nobody cares to  
Maybe I ask for the impossible  
Maybe nobody truly sees anybody

Everyone sees the image,  
Sees you from their perception,  
From the reflection  
Of what they want you to be

Everyone wants to be seen  
Beyond their playfulness and mischief,  
To the untainted heart that lies beneath  
Do you now see me?

**BENEATH THE PAIN OF A LOVE THAT CONTINUALLY  
EVADES**

Let the burning in your chest serve as a reminder  
On the days when you get too assured of self  
That you forget the young girl buried in the valley  
Of the dry bones of approval, validation, and love

Let the cadence of your heart remind  
The escalation of your pulse betray  
The pain that you try to hide behind the facade  
Of strong and assured young woman making her way in the  
world  
Let the turbulence stir the ugly truth of your being

There is no home for you in this heart  
No light for you in this tower  
No redemption for you in these tomes  
No hope for you at this gate

Come beggarly, come subdued  
Come haggard and beaten by the vagaries of life  
Come naked, stripped of clothing and warmth from the outside  
Come beaten, fingers biting and the gnashing of teeth

This door will slam in your face each time  
This heart, cold and unmoved will ever be  
The earlier you accept this fate, the better for you  
You will never be accepted and loved for who you are here



## BECOMING MY MOTHER

At the sound of the horn  
Our house becomes a graveyard  
Everyone would scramble for cover  
Television off, conversations end  
To your rooms, O ye children  
Save for I who must open the gates  
With trembling hands, checking my appearance again and again  
No use spooking the devil

My father always returns with a grim face  
Hardly ever a civil smile, tosses his briefcase at me  
And marches in, barely returning the greetings  
I would slink away to my room  
On my lucky days, or be the first subject  
Of our next daily sermon

We were strangers under the same roof  
I remember how my baby sister  
Used to cry whenever father returned  
Father, red-faced with anger would scream at her,  
“Never you cry when you see me!”  
My father’s face was really scary  
I would have cried too  
But I have been told  
I am not permitted to be a crying baby  
I learnt early not to waste time on tears

Mother makes excuses for him  
He is having difficulties in the office  
The economy is bad; it will get better  
I have seen the bruises and dark eyes



Mother always trips on invisible things  
She is very clumsy; I have heard her tell her friends

I have since escaped with the first man  
to show me some loving  
The total antithesis of my Father  
Soft-spoken, considerate, and caring  
Why am I bored to pieces, then?  
Why do I think my husband weak?  
Why do I crave some drama?  
Why am I becoming my mother?

**BEFORE I HAVE A DAUGHTER**

I must unlearn the shame  
That I have been forced to wear like a second skin  
I must look upon this body and see all of its kinks  
And imperfections  
Too short, too tall, too dark, too fair  
Too thin, too fat, shapeless, and then too curvy,  
Too much and then not enough  
I must look upon this parcel of enduring contradictions  
And love it, all the same; love it for the same

Before I have a daughter  
I must defy invisibility  
I am not of the ones who must only be seen but never heard  
I must love my own voice, lean into the sound of it  
The singsongness and whiplash bite that it can sometimes bear

Before I have a daughter  
I must defy likeability  
Shred the compulsive impulse to be liked  
To bend over backwards for society's fickle validation  
Tickled by approval that oscillates like a pendulum

Before I have a daughter  
I must wash off the abuses of my femininity  
Cleanse the trauma of wearing this identity  
Purge out the fear of error that looms over my head  
Lest I raise my daughter like an accident waiting to happen  
like my mother did me

**AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN**

All my life, I have been treated  
Like an accident waiting to happen  
My mother fears that I talk too much  
Much too loud, much too seen  
Much too flamboyant, much too wild

Don't draw attention to yourself  
Don't crave the masculine gaze  
Don't let evil eyes see you  
Don't be too much!

She fears I will get pregnant by the wayside  
One mistake too many  
In a brutally unforgiving society  
She fears that I will bring shame upon her

Dress appropriately!  
Don't expose your navel!  
Why are your bra hands showing?  
That gown is too short  
Only \*ashewos wear earrings that long  
What would people say?

The verdict is still out on my mother  
She fears I will, by my wilfulness,  
Destroy her pristine record,  
Gotten off much kowtowing,  
Cutting to size, silence and numbness

My mother fears my wildness  
She fears it will be her undoing

Doesn't God give us daughters



So our mothers could say  
I told you so?

\*Ashewo: (Yoruba) (derogatory): prostitute



**YOU SAY I'M A MAN**

You say I'm a man  
That I have a swagger to my walk  
That I am outspoken and confident  
That I am not looking for a man  
On whose income to live on  
That I have an opinion  
And I have the guts to say it

You say I'm a man  
That I defer to no one  
Except for greater logic  
That I am too ambitious  
I strive not only to be lord  
Of the other room  
That I want a say too  
In the boardroom

You say I'm a man  
That I aspire to do more  
Than smile, clean and cook  
I want much more  
Than making babies  
Singing lullabies all night long

You say I'm a man  
That I think  
More than I cry

Is it a crime  
For one of the fairer sexes  
To be any of these things?  
Pray tell, what is a woman supposed to be?



## NO FAVOURITES

I have never had any favourites  
Now I can never have any favourites  
Every pussy is to be tried and tested  
Call me an unrepentant hunter  
If you wish

Wasn't I sixteen and soft  
Wet dreams just commencing  
Only beginning to dream of girls  
And jerking off to pictures of nude models

When to the shelter of my favourite aunt I ran?  
Aunt Tellisa, how much I loved and respected you  
I have often seen the face of my first girl  
along your lovely face, she will be as pretty as you

How I would sit at your feet  
And never want to leave  
Listening to grandiose tales of life and men  
Those tales are harmless, you told me  
You were harmless, I always thought

The night when mom had to work overtime  
I think it would be my first night over  
How you pinned me to the wall  
And took me in your hands  
How you got a rise out of me  
With your knowing palms

The voices pounding in my head  
"This is my favourite aunt, this is my favourite aunt"

How you crushed me over and over



Till I went limp in your hands  
Then you repeated the act over and over  
Till I came to enjoy it, till I strove to take charge

Now I take charge  
Now I do the pounding  
Now I am never under  
Now I am on top, I do the sampling

Whom shall I tell my sorry tale?  
I hear that the man is the aggressor, never the victim.  
I live up to expectations now  
I sample all the wares on display and more  
I have no favourite

**DON'T!**

*For the young medical doctor who took the plunge and for everyone who has hummed that distraught soul song in silence for way too long.*

Don't tell me  
I ought to be happy

Don't tell me  
I have it better than most

Don't tell me  
That I ought to be grateful

Tell me something I don't know  
I have preached this sermon to many before you

Don't tell me I ought not to be depressed  
I have prescribed these pills to many a repressed soul

Don't judge me  
If you have never felt the weighty boulders  
Of worry and anxiety on your lithe shoulders

Don't preach at me  
If you have never opened your mouth  
To sing a joyful note  
And all that sprang forth is a dirge

Don't call me weak  
Until you wake on those nights  
When death seems more appealing

than the lonesome wraps of disgrace



Don't call me distraught  
Until you know what makes a man  
Choose a resting place in the lagoon  
rather than be tagged a loon

Don't pretend you care  
Since when have you cared  
Not once did you hear my hapless screams  
Don't patronise me  
By saying you know how it feels  
Don't weep, don't mourn,  
Don't!



## THE WAR IS STILL MUCH WITH US

And then we would speak of war  
like yet another nugget in history  
We would speak of heroes but never arrows  
We would speak of the historical relevance  
of the non- alignment of the Yorubas

Speak of the political potency of  
the sack of the Igbos from the North  
and the socio-economic factors  
heralding the break out of the war  
We would find big, big grammar  
to immortalize our cruelty to our fellow humanity

We would find not enough words  
for the woman whose only son took the fall  
Just one more drop in the sea of bodies  
A souvenir of valour around the badge of our generals

Not enough words for the man  
who will now sleep with eyes wide open  
clutching his head, jolting awake at every single sound  
Not for the girls, gagged and raped, then left for dead  
Not for the women whose husbands would never return  
Nor for the children who would never be found  
Not for the ones who would fall silently on the street  
Nor for the ones whose bodies would be dismembered beyond  
recognition

We would speak of war  
like just another badly acted Nollywood movie  
We would speak of all but the bitterness trapped in our bones

All but the vengeance burning in our eyes



All but the full belly of hate we now sleep on  
All but the hollow in our hearts,  
or the immeasurable pain our bodies drown in

We would speak of war, like another  
assemblage of fact, so matter-of-factly  
like the war ended even before it started

Then we would speak of war,  
All but this unending hate tearing us apart.

**ALUTA- STRUGGLE**

\*Aluta is ours by default  
Not taught, schooled or indoctrinated  
We understand like no other  
We know the workings of Aluta

‘Cos in Aluta  
We are born  
We took our first step in Aluta  
Now you’ve doomed us to take all of our steps in you

We move round and round  
Your meticulously drawn circles  
Following your warped compass  
Dizzy and confused have we become

Despite our tiredness, fatigue and failed strength  
You push us forward  
With better things ahead  
We bring out our reserve to catch this hope

Though our tunnel  
Seems like a journey never to end  
You push us on with the light ahead  
Though our skies are the darkest  
Dense with clouds as the rainforest is with grasses  
You give us a glimpse of the silver lining

Our reserves are spent  
We are too weak to move  
We are tired, we are weary

Yet you keep us going with the words  
\*Aluta Continua, Victoria Ascerta





\*Amanda Awetu

Not for lack of faith  
doubt or disbelief  
but we cannot help but ask ourselves  
is victory truly certain?

\*Aluta: Stuggle

\*Aluta continua, victoria ascerta: Aluta continues, victory is  
certain

\*Amanda Awetu: We shall not be discouraged

CAGED BIRDS DON'T SING

**CAGED BIRDS DON'T SING**

You say the plan is not to ground me  
Yet you ask that I be yours alone  
None other's

You say no plans to cage me  
You want me for your pet  
Calculated sweetness till I melt

Still, it is a bird you claim to love  
It is the free-spiritedness that draws you  
The flight that keeps you chasing  
The scent of sweet surrender that keeps you going

This is how to love a bird  
Spread her wings, let her fly  
Give her sail, let her soar

Know ye not  
That caged birds don't sing?

**PICK ME UP**

I'd have asked you  
to pour me a cup  
of sizzling pick me up,  
The attending buzz  
spiralling through lighted veins

I'd have asked you for a frenzied romp  
but all you ever offered is a dry hump.

**FULL BLOODED**

Sometimes I feel funny  
Sometimes I'm just horny  
An unintended touch  
A welcoming hug  
A look here, a smile there

And I'm floating on the wind  
Staring into the skies  
Daydreaming about wild and reckless fun  
Thinking thoughts deemed porn  
Feeling my blood overheating

Butterflies take flight in my tummy  
My eyes go all soulful and runny  
Faces trigger smouldering memories  
Lit up! Buzzing! Flaming!  
Set fire under me

I'm not a pervert  
I'm not a saint  
I do not deny the course of nature  
I'm just a full-blooded human

**IS THIS OUR END?**

I know how detachment feels  
It is a badge I wear with pride  
I know how elusiveness feels  
It is the armour I wear under this skin

I know what it is like  
To be left on the shelf  
It is a fate I have dealt others  
Countless times without a second thought

I know these signs too well  
I know this silence  
Is this how it feels  
to be on the receiving end of the stick?  
Is this how much it hurts to be left undone?

**TO ALL THE BOYS I HAVE LOVED BEFORE**

I will wear a waist bead  
for every foot that has ever  
crashed through this edifice

A relic it will be  
for every war ever fought  
for every unnamed mutant  
that ravaged this tome

Light, desire, pain, and pleasure  
fire, wind, water, and air  
chill, cold, curiosity, and climax

A reminder it will be  
that it is okay to scratch an itch  
slake some lust, stake a claim  
'tis never too late to start from scratch

**THE HATE I FEEL**

A new hate I have  
For pretenders and liars alike  
The very deceptive ones  
Crafty as foxes, treacherous as vipers  
Changing form faster than a chameleon  
Smiling with you  
As they plot your downfall  
Friends at the fore  
Yet worse than fiends at heart

A new hate I have  
For they who profess Christ as a front  
A facade for all of the wickedness  
Enemy of unity, laughter, and harmony  
Yet acclaimed sons and daughters  
Of the Prince of Peace

This hate I feel  
I worry for my heart  
'Cos looking into the abyss  
The abyss looks back into you  
After I have fed this hate  
I be not what I hate



**THE NEW CRAZY**

The child that I was  
was so crazed about reading  
I would pick up papers from the dump  
Off the street, to savour the tiny prints  
At a later time when no noise intrudes

The child that I was  
was so troubled  
I would weave tales  
and tell it to myself  
As I made my way to my next errand

The child that I was  
would remember a joke  
Along one pathetic errand  
and laugh out loud right there  
With no consciousness of who observed

Then I joined the league of craziness  
of acceptable behaviours; of what is and what is not  
of not laughing too hard or too long  
of talking only when spoken to  
of saying exactly what needs to be heard

They say it is adulthood  
I say it is madness  
They say it is normalcy  
I say it is a distorted order  
This is the new crazy

We are called to be flamboyant  
Free and true to self  
We are called to be butterflies



Flapping wings across barriers with glee  
We are called to be unrestrained as a waterfall

I am called to be me  
Paper-picking, blazing-tongue of coals  
Shapeshifter, playful to bat  
Asking me to be otherwise  
is throwing me into a chasm of insanity



## THE MOON IS THE CULPRIT

Brother, I know when you  
Prayed for that eclipse  
That you thought only of you

Yet, in the darkness that covers this land  
The sun has long gone to roost  
And this Moon has become the number one culprit

—no private irresponsibility

Selah

**STAY WITH ME**

This is how your melodies come to me  
free flow, unrestrained  
like a gushing tap

This is how poems  
used to come to me  
line after line  
tale after tale  
powerful, undisturbed as the wave

Now is to the chewing of pen  
to a line every other week  
to tales flitting in & out of sight  
Staring at a word for hours

My baby is gone, gone, gone  
Still I hear your whispers  
in the deep recesses of my soul

Could it be me who stopped listening?  
Grip me in your euphoria again  
would you please stay with me?



## SMIRK

This is how to smirk  
in the faces of those  
who expect you to amount to nothing

Look into the mirror each morning  
tell yourself, “You are nothing”  
Nothing like they expect you to be

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adebimpe Oluwafunmilayo Adeyemi, known as Fumsymoon in literary circles is a poet, writer, lawyer and activist whose writings has been focused on addressing socio-cultural and political issues and the topics that she feels very strongly about. She began writing in 2011 with her first poem titled “Aluta- struggle” which set the pace for a career in writing that intersect art with activism. Over the years, she has explored themes including but not limited to police brutality, war, justice, sexuality, femininity, child marriage, cancer awareness and so on.

Her passion for a saner society led to her participation in the award-winning documentary film, *Coconut Head Generation* which has afforded her a platform at various film festivals including but not limited to the Cinema Du Reel (Paris), Leeds International Festival, Open City Festival, Human Rights Festival where she sat on different panels on the subject of the instrumentality of art to the reshaping of society and a better world for all human kind.



Her works have been published by the Nigerian Tribune, Sahara Reporters, Olongo Africa, INKspiredng, Poems from the Heron Clan Anthology Series, Yiaga Africa Beating the Odds III, and other places.

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